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## The Name of the City – Social Memory and Oblivion: Wrocław Case

### Introduction

The name of a city is an essential part of its existence – just like people's names and surnames. Therefore, the change of the city's name is the most visible sign of the cultural transformation of the urban universe: “[E]ach change of a name, especially of a local one, is aimed, among other things, at causing changes in the identity of the inhabitants, erasing traces of the past, bringing out and emphasising the currently most important political and social elements” (Choroś, 2009, p. 99). The theme of power relations is increasingly present in contemporary research on urban names. Researchers (among others, anthropologists, linguists and historians) focus primarily on how an imposed ideological order (e.g. resulting from the change of the regime, state boundaries or the values of the dominant culture) shapes the “top-down” linguistic urban landscape<sup>1</sup> (cf. Stoltz & Warnke, 2016). In this particular case, it is

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<sup>1</sup> Linguistic landscape is understood here as “visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 23).

a name that, on the one hand, testifies to the city's past that is still difficult for its contemporary inhabitants. On the other hand, however, this name now constitutes an essential thread in the creation of the city's image as an open and modern metropolis. Following the literature on the subject, I assume that even when a city is transformed into another differently named city, its past persists in its architecture, street layout, diaries, old maps, and sometimes fragments of foreign-sounding words on walls or everyday objects. These earlier names still contribute to the city and are part of its unique cultural inheritance:

[...] Lithuania's Vilnius is also Wilna, Wilno, Vilne; Lviv also goes by Lemberg, Leopolis, Lwow; Tallinn is Reval; Oradea is Grosswardein and Nagyvárad. This pluralism is not a deliberate confusion sown to puzzle nominalists. Each name stands for a different segment, a different culture, a different language, a different tradition, and it takes all of them together and then some to make up the city in question. They designate different journeys through life, different backgrounds, different residential streets and neighborhoods, different schools and "places of worship". (Schlögel, 2016, pp. 254–255)

Although this persistence of previous urban incarnations is sometimes silent (not included in current urban discourses), it can still impact and shape the way the inhabitants think about their city – also as a negative point of reference. This is the case of Wrocław, one of the largest urban centres incorporated into Poland as a result of the decisions made at the Potsdam Conference of 1945. The material heritage of the pre-war German city – Breslau – is still a significant element of urban space. It is perhaps crucial to such an extent that "[Wrocław] should properly be called Bresław so that the fusion of the halves of the German and Polish name could express its essence" (Zawada, 2015, pp. 36–37).

Wrocław began its life on the ruins of Breslau as a result of imposed political arrangements. For years of the existence of the Polish socialist state, the pre-war name of the city was not spoken aloud. In public discourse, it was a contradiction of the prevailing version of history, which focused on "the existence of permanent links between Lower Silesia and the motherland, as well as its inhabitants' ties to the territories" and on presenting "the struggle for the liberation of Lower Silesia from the German rule" (Thum, 2011, p. 319). In colloquial discourses, the name Breslau was also (and perhaps still is) a metonymy of the alien culture of the hated occupiers and of the ambiguous (also in terms of emotions) process of the settlers' taking over of the goods left behind. For decades, the German name of the city did not exist either in official speeches or in private conversations, even though its everyday life was defined by the architecture which was different from the architecture of the largest pre-war Polish cities: Łódź, Kraków or Warszawa, by fragments of street names and names of pre-war shops peeking out from under the layers of paint, by everyday objects with incomprehensible Gothic words or by foreign-sounding names on cemetery tombstones. As recalled by Wrocław-born writer Ewa Stachniak, "in the common

language of Wrocław, the word Breslau was uttered in a hushed voice, like a curse, with much emotion, because it was slightly forbidden and dangerous or shameful” (Tuszyńska, 2003, p. 22).

In the 1990s, the discourse of urban elites began building a new identity for the city, based on the city’s multi-layered and multicultural heritage. For thirty years, the local government has been promoting the image of Wrocław as a “meeting place”. I will present the essence of this slogan following Rafał Dutkiewicz, the predecessor of the incumbent Mayor of Wrocław: “Only by looking at the city’s centuries-long history does it show its great wealth and enormous potential. A city of meetings, a city of tolerance; in short, an open city” (Dutkiewicz, 2018, p. 6). However, in the image of the “meeting place” proposed by the city’s elite, there is not much room for reflection on the significance of Breslau itself for the modern city – both from the material and identity-based perspectives. Slogans about Wrocław’s “openness” and “multiculturalism” are, most of all, the elements of creating the image of the city as a brand (cf. Dolińska & Makaro, 2013). Andrzej Zawada writes openly that the slogan “multiculturalism” is a strategy of avoiding facing the material remains of the Germans, the remains of Breslau: “The peculiar myth of the multiculturalism of parts of the Western Territories, e.g. Wrocław or Gdańsk, functions as the weakening or ‘softening’ factor of post-Germanness visible every day especially in the architecture and the civilisational shaping of the landscape” (Zawada, 2015, p. 93).

In this study, I pose a question about the discursive presence of the name Breslau and strategies of oblivion in the narratives of the elites and contemporary inhabitants of Wrocław. An essential point of reference for studying the name Breslau is the post-war public discourse about Wrocław. Due to the purely political circumstances of the city’s incorporation into Poland, from its very inception Wrocław was supported by identity narratives created by the city’s elites – primarily by historians, writers and journalists (cf. Browarny, 2019; Thum, 2011). The images created in public discourse provided the residents with the narrative anchors necessary to create a sense of belonging to the city. What is worth mentioning here, the creative role of the urban elites is still vital for the constantly refreshed and enriched urban foundation stories (Biskupska, 2020).

### **Social memory and oblivion – a discursive perspective**

This study draws on the analytical framework of discourse analysis. Discourse can be defined as language in social use, as an element that simultaneously constructs and is constructed by social reality. Discourse analysis is thus the study of linguistic reality, enriched with the assumption that discourse contains an interpretation of what is happening around and through a given utterance (cf. e.g. Potter, 1996;

Wetherell, 1998). This paper focuses primarily on the strategies by means of which the lexeme Breslau exists or is omitted in the discursive images of the world of the citizens of Wrocław.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, the following analysis can be situated in the context of onomastic discourse analysis. The idea of discursive studies on proper names was proposed by Mariusz Rutkowski and Katarzyna Skowronek (Rutkowski & Skowronek, 2020). This concept is based on the assumption that

proper names mean and – from the perspective – they act [...]. We are interested in names in specific utterances, names used not accidentally, names that sometimes constitute the axis, and sometimes the background, making it possible to reach the real semantic, pragmatic, ideological, axiological and performative value of linguistic messages. (Rutkowski & Skowronek, 2020, p. 5)

In the perspective of social memory/oblivion adopted for this study, proper names, such as Breslau as well as Wrocław or Poland or Europe, are the eponyms of importance to the discourse scholar. They constitute “the labels of the content accumulated in them” (Chlebda, 2018, p. 62). Likewise, they are important determinants of the discursive images of the world present in the respondents’ narratives: “[Proper names] acquire an individual meaning, which is the ‘baggage’ of superadded meanings, sometimes fixed in general social knowledge shared by the recipient and sender of the text” (Rutkowski & Skowronek, 2020, p. 8).

The research problem discussed in this article is the discursive construction of the name Breslau in the discourse of Wrocław elites and its existence in the social memory/oblivion of Wrocław inhabitants. Social memory is treated as intersubjective memory existing at the micro-social level in colloquial discourses. Social memory exists at the interface of the group and the individual. It is made up of fragments of personal experiences that are subject to discourse. In other words, it is assumed that in social memory, there are primarily stories that, with standardised content and in a standardised form, are presented to others (cf. Potter, 1996). Social memory understood in this way can be distinguished from the notion of collective memory, which describes another level of collective construction of the past. Thus, collective memory can be defined as the threads of the past significant from a macro-social perspective, present in the dominant public discourse, most often specifying collective identity. It is the memory that legitimises and co-creates national identity:

Collective memory [...] is a dynamic process of identification with selected historical phenomena. This process is played out at once in our heads and in the public space with the aid of societal processes such as political rituals, construction of memorials and school education. By participating in public campaigns that create images of the past in

<sup>2</sup> The author understands the discursive image of the world following the understanding offered by Waldemar Czachur, who views it as “discursively profiled interpretation of reality that can be grasped as a set of judgements about the world, people, things, events” (Czachur, 2011, p. 87).

the public space, we become, *nolens volens*, actors in the process of constructing collective memory. (Traba, 2013, p. 16)

The perspective of social memory specified above is supplemented with the category of oblivion. Known as “paradoxical existence-non-existence” (Sendyka, 2016, p. 255), oblivion is a category which is still poorly recognised in the field of memory studies. According to Andrzej Szpociński, oblivion is treated as “a splinter, a reverse” of the mainstream of memory studies (Szpociński, 2015, p. 7). The notion of oblivion was introduced to Polish reflection on broadly understood collective memory by Maria Hirschowicz and Elżbieta Neyman: “If, therefore, we define the accumulation and registration of information and the structures of their interpretation fixed in consciousness as memory, then oblivion is everything that is outside this area, both the contents that have not been assimilated and those that have been eliminated or forgotten” (Hirschowicz & Neyman, 2001, p. 24).

The aforementioned definition was further developed by Piotr Tadeusz Kwiatkowski, who viewed the phenomenon of oblivion “as a socially significant gap in collective memory concerning figures and facts of significant importance for the community, which distinguishes it from the natural process of forgetting that does not cause damage to present or future culture or identity” (Kwiatkowski, 2014, pp. 272–273). In his proposal, the scholar emphasises the difference between the social practice of not remembering and the individual process of forgetting. Moreover, Kwiatkowski suggests that an essential aspect of oblivion is the inclusion of knowledge of the past that is “preserved through various methods of perpetuating the past” but which – at the same time and for some reason – is marginalised and its elements “do not function in social discourse and do not constitute a framework of reference for practical actions” (Kwiatkowski, 2014, p. 273). Thus, oblivion is an existing, albeit poorly disseminated, body of knowledge of the past (a kind of “antiquarian memory” (Szpociński, 1999, pp. 44–45)), the content of which can be reached and, in specific contexts (primarily politically conditioned; Szpociński, 2015, p. 10) included in the circulation of sustained, obligatory memory (be it social or collective).

Nevertheless, oblivion itself is also a social practice – a (discursive) action towards events or people placed in its field: “In social terms, then, oblivion would be a state of communal referring to the past, one in which what is remembered, what is repressed, and what has not yet been assimilated coexist” (Sendyka, 2016, p. 256). Roma Sendyka points to the features that reveal the presence of oblivion in colloquial (vernacular) utterances. The characteristics indicated are: performativity: “Oblivion is performative: it reveals itself in gestures, in actions, in their omission; it can be linked to prohibitions”; somatisation: “[it is] transmitted through body expression and facial expression more often than through structured discourse”; irrationality: “It produces narratives that legendarise the past, introduces supernatural motifs and

is full of ghost stories or uncanny events”; the disruption of narrative fluency, which Roma Sedyka explains in the following manner:

[O]n the linguistic level, [oblivion] communicates especially through negative forms: concealment, omission, abandoning, stuttering, other kinds of distortions of tone and form of the utterance [...] and affectivity, which may be combined with sensations of anger, fear, shame, evoking retroactively strong emotional reactions towards objects that remind us of the event. (Sedyka, 2016, p. 265)

Because of the above characteristics, oblivion is a phenomenon that can realistically shape the discursive images of the world of those who face it.

In order to sketch out the existence/avoidance strategies of the word Breslau in contemporary Wrocław discourses, in the following part of this study, I will present the ways in which the word is used in the discourse of the elite and in the colloquial discourses of Wrocław citizens. The research material representing the public discourse consists of the examples of the functioning of the word Breslau in academic studies (mainly historical and literary studies). I have chosen those fragments of academic works to discuss for two reasons. Firstly, they are composed of statements made by renowned and recognisable researchers connected with Wrocław who shape the images of the city’s past in public discourse. Secondly, the works in question represent two diametrically different attitudes to the lexeme Breslau.

On the other hand, the strategies of referring to and avoiding the name Breslau in the colloquial discourse of Wrocław inhabitants will be presented on the basis of the empirical material of thirty in-depth narrative interviews collected by the author between May 2018 and January 2020.<sup>3</sup> I conducted interviews with the representatives of the second (born in the 1950s and 1960s) and third (born in the 1970s and 1980s) generations of Wrocław inhabitants. The selection was purposeful and two factors constituted the selection criterion: (1) being born in Wrocław or having lived there for at least ten years and (2) not being a memory leader – not being professionally or non-professionally involved in the history of the city and urban issues in the broad sense. I aimed to reach the people who are primarily recipients of the content of public discourse rather than co-creators or leaders of the city’s memory. In the course of the study, fifteen interviews were collected in each of the indicated groups. However, no narrative differences between the indicated generations were observed regarding the theme of this study. For this reason, unless indicated otherwise, the collected material is treated as a whole.

<sup>3</sup> The study under consideration focused on the narrative patterns created in Wrocław public discourse (most of all, on the continually updated foundation myths like, for example, the Piast myth, the myth of another Warsaw, the Great Flood of 1997), maintained and transformed in the colloquial discourses of the citizens of Wrocław. I was also interested in the narrations about elements of the cultural landscape present in the discourse of the city inhabitants, with particular emphasis on the pre-war German heritage of the city.

## The name of Breslau present in / absent from the academic discourse

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, scholars focused on research on the public perception of Wrocław's past (cf. Czajkowski et al., 2015; Thum, 2011). However, the cultural connotations of the pre-war name of the city remain beyond the interest of researchers. What is more, in scholarly studies concerning the pre-war city, the name Wrocław prevails. An example of such a Polish-centric view of the city's past is the volume *Orbis Wratislaviae: Wrocław w relacjach dawnych i współczesnych* [Orbis Wratislaviae: Wrocław in Past and Contemporary Accounts] (Ruchniewicz & Zybura, 2018). It is a collection of excerpts from travel accounts, letters, diaries and memoirs about the city written from the fifteenth century to the present day. Despite the Latin name in the title, the texts created in different centuries and written by authors originating from different cultural (and linguistic) backgrounds constitute the descriptions of the cities which have the Polish contemporary name – Wrocław.<sup>4</sup> In many of the stories quoted, the modern name appears already in the title. This can be illustrated by the following examples: "Listy z Wrocławia podczas podróży po Śląsku w 1791 roku" [Letters from Wrocław During a Trip Around Silesia in 1791] (Zöllner, 2018, p. 36) or "Francuzi na przedpolach Wrocławia w 1806 roku" [The French on the Outskirts of Wrocław in 1806] (Alexis, 2018, p. 57). Frequently, the lexeme Wrocław is also present in the first opening sentences of the text: "Wrocław is not only the capital of the Duchy of Wrocław [...] but of the whole of Silesia, as well" (Zeiller, 2018, p. 18). The consistency of using the name makes these voices from different eras and cultures tell the same story – the story of "Wrocław". This view of the city's past is ubiquitous.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly enough, it also happens that this Polish perspective sometimes takes an astonishing form visible in the public discourse examples as: "German Wrocław" (Zawada, 2015, p. 48).

Such a one-dimensional approach to toponymy may be surprising in the studies concerning a city located in the territories annexed to Poland in 1945. Firstly, these lands are these territories whose massive post-war renaming, projecting the Polishness of these lands, is thoroughly described in the literature (cf. Choroś, 2009; Wagińska-Marzec, 1997). Secondly, it is precisely because of this post-war ideological entanglement that there are still discussions among scholars about the proper

<sup>4</sup> In individual cases, the titles of published texts signal the existence of earlier names of the city, for example, "Bressla" (Schedel, 2018, p. 8) or "Breslau, Vratislavia, Wratislawia" (Zeiller, 2018, p. 18). However, there are no references to them in the central part of the text – only Wrocław is mentioned there.

<sup>5</sup> This is a collection of other examples of thinking about the city's history from a "Wrocław" perspective. These contemporary historical studies describe Breslau of the first decades of the twentieth century: *Miedzy prywatnym a publicznym: Życie codzienne we Wrocławiu w latach 1938–1944* [Between the Private and the Public: Everyday Life in Wrocław from 1930 to 1944] (Hytrek-Hryciuk, 2019); *Wrocław 1916: Kronika miasta w czasie wielkiej wojny* [Wrocław of 1916: A City Chronicle During the Great War] (Palica, 2016).

designation of these territories. It remains an open question whether these are the Recovered Territories, “the Recovered Territories” or perhaps the Western and Northern Territories. When justifying the use of the term “the Recovered Territories” in her studies, Małgorzata Praczyk, a historian investigating this issue, observes:

The emotional discussion that surrounds this name does not allow us to think about it in the same way we think about other seemingly similar names of historical and geographical regions or political and administrative formations. The very fact that most scholars feel an obligation to explain the reasons why they use a particular form of the name reveals that in this case, the situation is complex. (Praczyk, 2018, pp. 19–20)

The name of a place is not transparent and neutral. It is its interpretation, a proposal for a world view, as Katarzyna Taborska writes in her analysis of contemporary Polish-centric strategies of translating pre-war German names of Polish post-war localities in Polish literature and scholarly studies of the last decades: “If the German equivalent of the city – Johannisburg – is used instead of the name Pisz, then what is triggered is several connotations that perhaps do not appear at all when the Polish nomenclature is used” (Taborska, 2014, p. 131). A name creates an image of a place. Moreover, a name directs the viewer towards the ideologically “correct” reading of a given place, as is stressed by Norman Davies in the following quote: “[Names] are extremely important. They do much more than merely identify people and places. They reveal the viewpoints and the prejudices of those who use them” (Davies, 2002, p. xvi). Polonising the image of the past by referring to it as exclusively “Wrocław’s” probably facilitates and tames the (still) ambiguous history of a culturally foreign city, the history which is difficult to accept. At the same time, however, emphasising this “Wrocław-ness” (still) makes the city’s heritage from before 1945 socially and culturally invisible and unnamed. Hence, it is discursively excluded from the contemporary urban universe.

From another perspective, the dominance of the “Wrocław” view of the city’s past may mean that the appearance of the lexeme Breslau in public discourse arouses interest and attracts the attention of scholars and residents of the city. A case in point is the public reception of Marek Krajewski’s novels about the Breslau policeman Eberhard Mock. This detective series (the first volume of the novels about Mock appeared in 1999; so far, the author has written eleven parts), set in the Breslau of the 1920s and 1930s, was positively received by Polish readers. It resulted in the fact that the media recognised both the whole series and the author. Consequently, the prominence of the novel on the reading market was treated by some scholars dealing with urban issues as proof of the general acceptance of Breslau’s heritage by contemporary Wrocław citizens:

[...] in his novels, [Marek Krajewski] reconstructs pre-war Breslau. What is important, the popularity of his books is largely due to the references to Breslau’s heritage. Thus, the

forgotten and abandoned German tradition of the city becomes close and familiar thanks to the specific properties of literature. (Kubicki, 2010, pp. 60–61)

Although immersing oneself in the gloomy and decadent world created by Krajewski “one can also have the impression that the life of the inhabitants of Breslau consists mainly of eating, getting drunk, beating up whomever they can, having perverse sex, scheming, stealing, cheating, betraying and murdering; the more sophisticated, the better” (Gemra, 2013, p. 141), the readership of these *roman noirs* is also treated as the evidence of the rebirth of the pre-war bourgeoisie. The ways of spending free time as well as culinary, aesthetic and economic habits are to be recreated. Such reading of Krajewski’s novel is present in Gregor Thum’s study: “It’s Breslau burghes, Breslau’s ‘bourgeoisie’ who have become models for a post-socialist lifestyle. Fascination with the bourgeois and simultaneously German city is particularly evident in Marek Krajewski’s detective novels, the first of which was published in 1999 with the provocative title *Śmierć w Breslau* [Eng. edition: *Death in Breslau*, 2008] and made Krajewski celebrated author throughout Poland” (Thum, 2011, p. 396), or in Wojciech Browarski’s publication:

In this respect the prose of Marek Krajewski, the author of a series of retro detective novels, [...] has awakened in the readers [...] the feeling that the most attractive part of the heritage of the capital of Silesia which is worth getting to know is just the metropolitan bourgeoisie. On this basis, former Breslauers, both those famous and prominent as well as those ordinary ones who lived in our homes before, are increasingly included in the imagined community of Wrocław citizens. (Browarny, 2019, p. 97)

Why do we arrive at this simplistic equation of the success of a retro novel with the performance of scientific proof? One of the reasons for including Krajewski’s novel in the reflections upon the perception of the city’s cultural heritage is the word Breslau. The writer has made it the hallmark of his novels. As he admits, putting this lexeme in the title served as a lure: it attracted readers’ attention, aroused interest and broke the taboo of the pre-war German city that was still present – let us emphasise it – at the turn of the twenty-first century. However, Krajewski’s proposal was treated literally – not as an artistic creation but as a realistic, topographical or even reporter’s depiction of the pre-war city. In other words, a feature of Krajewski’s works that also drew the scholars’ attention was the “Germanness” of the world created by the writer. In subsequent books, the author recreated the toponymy of the German city with great panache and detail and sketched vivid portraits of Breslauers – Germans in flesh and blood. Creating the environment for Mock’s activities, Krajewski named (though mainly for the purpose of presenting his own vision of the city) what had so far remained unnamed in the consciousness of Wrocław citizens – the architectural silhouette of Breslau, its culture and its inhabitants.

Treating the popularity of Marek Krajewski's novels as empirical proof of the incorporation of German heritage into the cultural identity of the Polish city – while at the same time there are no in-depth studies on the subject among the citizens of Wrocław themselves – is unconvincing. An indication of how tenuous the link between the commercial success of Krajewski's black detective stories and the general acceptance by the people of Wrocław of the legacy of Breslau can be seen in the reactions to the articles referring to those novels and in the questions the internet users posed to the writer. It is worth noting that most of those queries pertained to the author's use of the word Breslau: "Why do you write Breslau and not Wrocław in the title? After all, it is our city, isn't it? It does not annoy me but there are people who, because of their turbulent experience, do not want to hear that name"; "Why cannot the Germans call Wrocław 'Wrocław'? Somehow others call it 'Wrocław'"; "I do not like calling Wrocław Breslau either! The question is: is Mr Krajewski Polish? Simply put, it is a Polish city and its name – the Polish name – is adopted worldwide" (Gemra, 2013, pp. 130–131). Both the expectations and hopes connected with the vision of Breslau proposed by Krajewski as well as some readers' reactions to this lexeme, visible in academic studies, show that the pre-war name of the city is still a sensitive point in the post-war discourses of Wrocław – both in public and private discourses of the city inhabitants.

### **Breslau in the colloquial discourse of the inhabitants of Wrocław**

In the empirical material collected for the study, the word Breslau was uttered by nine out of thirty of the interviewees (four people classified as belonging to the second generation and five belonging to the third generation of Wrocław citizens). This relatively small number and the strictly defined context in which the lexeme appeared in the interviews (more on this in a moment) may indicate the weak presence of the oikonym in the colloquial discourse of the inhabitants of Wrocław. Furthermore, despite the passage of years (distancing the inhabitants from the pre-war city) and an active place policy, this may indicate that the name Breslau is embedded more in the area of oblivion than in the social memory of the inhabitants of Wrocław. The few narratives in which Breslau is present can also be treated as a testimony to the practice of not remembering the reality connoted by this lexeme.

The lexeme Breslau appears in the interviews in response to one of the last questions which were asked: "What does post-German mean?"<sup>6</sup> In several cases, the reference to Breslau is made at the beginning of the answer to this question:

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<sup>6</sup> The notion of "post-Germanness" is in itself a complex analytical category worth discussing. However, this theme will be developed elsewhere.

[Researcher: What does the word post-German mean to you?] Hmm... I don't like it very much; I'll say something; when you talk about Wrocław using Breslau I get very indignant at Germans as well, right? *It's not Breslau any more, it's Wrocław.* Well, post-German means that it was built when Wrocław was still Breslau, that is, during the German rule. (9/F/72)<sup>7</sup>

What does post-German mean to me [speaks slowly, thinking] mmm I have no idea because... it's like that, perhaps the very name of this city, Breslau, is connected with this, well, only with this, because, because with nothing else; well maybe with some things that are still there from the time when the Germans lived here, well, well, maybe on this basis, taking into account that they only lived here and left this and this is like after them, right? (23/M/56)<sup>8</sup>

The most important context for talking about Breslau (visible also in the above fragments) is people, i.e. Germans. It is significant that the pre-war architecture, still clearly present in the city, does not bring back the memories of Breslau. It is contemporary, often personal, contact with Germans that elicits the use of the word Breslau:

I [...] always think Breslau even if sometimes... sometimes I wonder if... when I write to Germans for example, right? Where I'm from does it make sense to write Wrocław even though I write Wrocław because as if... but only after some reflection do I sometimes write this Breslau, Wrocław-Breslau. (2/F/60)

We usually said Wrocław. Although [we also said] Breslau when I started... [when] there appeared, there appeared friends from Germany, we started to say... these relations, in the sense that I also have a [German] friend and so on and it was easier for them to pronounce Breslau. (5/F/73)

The narrative fluency disorders visible in the above fragments (repetitions, hesitations, stops, stammers) indicate that for my interlocutors, using the word Breslau is not an easy communicative activity; it requires reflection. These repetitions or self-corrections of the uttered sentences may indicate that the speaker is reaching the limits of the area of oblivion. Uttering the word Breslau is sometimes treated as a kind of communicative compromise with Germans (e.g. *sometimes I write this Breslau, Wrocław-Breslau; it was easier for them to pronounce*).

For the interlocutors, the lexeme Breslau is not simply the pre-war equivalent of the Polish name. The slogan Breslau connotes the elements of a foreign cultural universe which is not only different from their own universe but also irrevocably gone – *Breslau is gone*:

<sup>7</sup> Quotations from the interviews are referenced as follows: interview number; F/M – female/male; year of birth.

<sup>8</sup> For the sake of clarity of the analysis, at most two excerpts from the interviews illustrating particular topics addressed are cited.

I rebel *very very very much* when the word Breslau... [R: And why?] Because it's Wrocław and not as if I don't have... well it's interesting, I don't know... well because there's no more Breslau, it's Wrocław. It's as if it ceased to be a German city. It is and we call it because it's like, I don't know, [say] Berlin used to be [called] windmill and we'd still call it windmill although the Germans already call it Berlin. (9/F/72)

It's not Breslau, it's Wrocław. I don't know, it's not Katowitz but it's Katowice. [...] It's not. It's already been seventy years. Let's give it a rest, it's already Polish. (13/M/70)

When the interviewees talk about Breslau, they talk about a city that no longer exists, about a city that is locked in the past. Therefore, they object to the use of this oikonym with reference to the present. The above-quoted statement is an example, as is the following view:

I mean, as a resident of Wrocław, you know, it annoys me when Germans come and say Breslau; or they come and speak German. [...] I'm the one who speaks Polish, I don't speak German. I hate that language. I used to learn it at school but no no, this is not Breslau, this is Wrocław. (13/M/70)

In the collected empirical material, Wrocław is also not viewed as an heir to the material inheritance of Breslau. There are no threads in the narratives that point to the continuation and persistence of urban culture, the sharing of the material fabric of the city, although the shape of the modern city, for example, its city centre or public buildings, was created during the times of Breslau. This lack of continuity is present in the narrative contrast between "we" and "they": "my/our Wrocław" vs "their (Germans') Breslau". This distinction is a fundamental aspect of the respondents' perception of the city. The following fragment illustrates this:

Mmm it's for sure that there is a greater care for historical monuments, that is, for the good that, yeah, we found after Germany because Wrocław, however, as we know, was German. The Germans still consider it their Breslau, but we don't try to destroy it. If something is really no longer salvageable or a building is no longer salvageable then it is clear that it is to be demolished. (3/F/77)

In the analysed interviews, Breslau is a German city or rather a city of Germans (e.g. *Breslau was also theirs* (5/F/73); *The Germans still consider it their Breslau* (3/F/77)). In the collected interviews, there is no other context for the location of the pre-war city other than ethnicity. And Wrocław? One of the interviewees says: *It's as if it ceased to be a German city* (9/F/72). However, the national context does not work the other way round: in the interviews, there are no identity-related clarifications created with the words Polish, Polishness or Poles. Perhaps Polishness is such an obvious connotation of the eponym Wrocław that it does not need to be emphasised or singled out. In the analysed narratives, one can find traces of an identity frame other than the Polish perspective. This point of reference is created by being born in Wrocław – being a Wrocław native. The argument of being born in Wrocław and

consequently *being at home* is crucial for the interlocutors since it is present in most of the interviews. At the same time, however, it is treated as conclusive and unambiguously closing the consideration of the problematic heritage of the city, e.g. *I was born here and I do not analyse this city* (9/F/72); *I was born in Wrocław, I feel a native of Wrocław simply* (17/F/55); *I have the right to be here because I live here, because I was born here* (5/F/73); *I just feel so connected to Wrocław that I don't even think I have ever really thought about my roots, I don't know, maybe I live in the present very much* (28/F/76).

Being born in Wrocław and the associated rights to the city also influence the narratives in a different manner – by the already indicated emphasis on the fact that Wrocław is mine (*mój Wrocław*, “my Wrocław”). Kwiryna Handke writes that the possessiveness present in the language is one of the most important determinants of individuals’ identification with a place (Handke, 2009, p. 43). Furthermore, of particular importance here are the possessive pronouns – the emotional markers of a sense of the ownership of the place:

I've always been aware that this is where Breslau was, right? that it was but Breslau was always Wrocław, right? and never Breslau somehow, no, not even... even when I hear it now it doesn't reach me. This is *my Wrocław*, not Breslau, right? (12/F/60)

I was jealous. [...] [R: Jealous?] Yes, because it's my city, Wrocław, and they're taking the name away from me, they come back here, you know. But then I finally thought to myself that Breslau was also theirs, so I got over it. Well, you know, you have to look at it from both sides, right? If someone understands more... And when I said Wrocław and they didn't know where it was, and when I said Breslau they were like “aah yeah, beautiful city”; yeah *ours, mine, I said.* (5/F/73)

The location of (the name of) Breslau in the closed past is connected with another important feature present in the analysed statements, which also points to the presence of the practice of oblivion. The interviewees emphasise their negative emotional attitudes (e.g. *I am annoyed; I am terribly indignant; I rebel; I was jealous; let's give it a rest; I am very, very, very indignant*) towards the contemporary use of the name Breslau that they describe. In other words, they emphasise their lack of acceptance for the activities that could pull Breslau out of the “existence-non-existence” of oblivion:

I mean, as a Wrocław inhabitant, you know, it annoys me when Germans come and say Breslau [...]. Of course most [inhabitants] were already born in Wrocław so it is theirs, it is theirs. It is not German. Of course there's Breslau somewhere in subconsciousness but it's already theirs. (13/M/70)

To conclude this part of the analysis, it is worth pointing out that the word Breslau appears spontaneously, mainly in the narratives of people whose ancestors (grandparents or parents) came from the Polish Eastern Borderlands – the territories

annexed to the USSR after the Second World War. This is a total of six people out of nine whose statements form the basis of the above analyses. One person's family comes from Greater Poland (i.e. the pre-war border areas with Germany), and the parents of two other persons come from central Poland (the area around Kielce and Łódź). The analysed material is too modest to draw any far-reaching conclusions. However, it may be worth asking a question about the differences in the perception of the existing German heritage by people whose ancestors were forced by border changes to come to Wrocław (or other places in the so-called Recovered Territories) and often spent their whole lives longing for their lost homes, towns, even the landscape, and by people whose ancestors came to this area voluntarily in search of a better life and higher social position. Perhaps this context of the arrival of the first generations influences the way their children and grandchildren think about the city's foreign past.

### **Concluding remarks**

In the analysed fragments of academic discourse, the name Breslau is still a problematic term. The above-mentioned authors of the historical studies avoid the word Breslau and use the contemporary Polish name of the city when reconstructing its past. This Polish-centred attitude makes it difficult for the city's inhabitants to get to know and accept Breslau. On the other hand, literary scholars draw conclusions (unsupported by scientific knowledge) about the acceptance of the German heritage by the inhabitants of Wrocław on the basis of (still) incidental occurrences of the word Breslau in public discourse or – more precisely – in popular literature.

The fact that the lexeme Breslau is problematic in the city elites' discourses influences the way in which this word is perceived in colloquial discourses. What results from studies is that for the contemporary inhabitants, the names Breslau and Wrocław are not continuation – they do not form two faces of the same city but two separate universes belonging to different temporal and cultural orders. Contemporary Wrocław and Breslau in the past are separated by a still-functioning mental border, drawn just after the Second World War, which performs many identity functions: "The border has its own rhetoric, organises the actions of communities (production of mythologies and nationalisms), implies the becoming of identity (interference with otherness/foreignness) [...]" (Szydłowska, 2013, p. 312). This is why the authentic urban heritage is replaced in the narratives of the citizens of Wrocław by post-war foundation creations: about the multicultural "meeting place", about the medieval Piast heritage of the city, or about the pioneers – the first inhabitants who, with sacrifice and courage, raised the Polish city from the (nameless) ruins. What is also a consequence of the silence about Breslau in public discourse is the (negative)

emotional attitude (clearly present in the collected material) towards the contemporary use of this name observed among Germans or the citizens of Wrocław themselves. More importantly, these Wrocław and Breslau universes cannot meet because, as Stefan Kiedroń notes:

For if we allow the word *Breslau* to be used instead of *Wrocław*, we allow thinking that our city may become German again. Similarly, the use of the names *Danzig* or *Stettin* could mean the threat of losing these cities. However, when we hear *Warschau* or *Krakau*, we have no such feelings. Berlin's *Warschauer Straße* has often been a symbol of good Polish-German relations. And what is the reaction when we see *Breslauer Straße*, *Waldenburger Straße* or *Danziger Straße* in German cities? (Kiedroń, 2018, p. 333)

The analyses indicate that in the case of Breslau, apart from the discursive presence of the word, an equally important category is its sustained absence, which manifests itself primarily in the consistent omission of the German name of the city when speaking of the past. The practices of oblivion observed in the course of the analysis result from avoiding the pre-war name in the public discourse of Wrocław consistently throughout all post-war decades. Keeping the lexeme Breslau in the space of social oblivion has significant consequences for constructing the city's identity and situating the citizens of Wrocław in the urban space. Including the material remains of the pre-war city into the stories about Wrocław should be analysed in this context. The heritage of Breslau is foreign. It belongs to *them – to Germans* despite the fact that the pre-war city tissue creates – to a great extent – the fabric of modern-day Wrocław.

In a city without a past (excluding the “Piast” shadows), the present is the most important. Therefore, the most vital perspective to perceive the city is to be born in it. Being born in post-war Wrocław is a sufficient argument to free oneself from a reflective look at the complex heritage of the city. It allows one to turn away from what is difficult and what remains unnamed. It is also essential that references to German bourgeois culture, firmly accented by Wrocław researchers, did not appear in any form in the analysed narratives of the post-war generations of Wrocław inhabitants. Furthermore, they could not appear because, as Jerzy Szacki notes:

It would take a long time to argue about what is the bourgeoisie, burgesses, the age of the bourgeoisie, bourgeois society, etc. [...] no matter what definitions are adopted, one thing remains indisputable: these concepts – so full of content in German history – are largely empty in Polish history or refer to something outside the empirical reality of this country. (Szacki, 1996, p. 187)

In other words, the reference of Wrocław elites to the bourgeois culture of Breslauers, as identity-attractive for the city's contemporary inhabitants, only increases the sense of alienation and misunderstanding of Breslau among the latter.

What is essential, among those constantly reconstructed stories about the beginning of the city there is another significant urban name – denoting, like Breslau, a city that no longer exists but is much more real and (narratively) alive for the inhabitants of Wrocław. This is pre-war Lwów (not modern Ukrainian Lviv) – a city whose dominant image in Poland is devoid of Ukrainian, Jewish or German themes and which is an image of the Polish world “before the catastrophe” of war, the Holocaust, Soviet repression and the expatriation of the 1940s” (Kotyńska, 2015, p. 87). The story of Wrocław as a “relocated Lwów”, where the latter was treated as the intellectual and cultural leaven of Wrocław’s identity, is supported by public discourse and, unlike the one of Breslau, it creates the proud, Arcadian past of Wrocław. For this reason, it is freely and frequently incorporated by most of the interlocutors into their narratives about Wrocław’s past. A good case in point is the following excerpt:

[Wrocław] belonged to different countries so there were remains of different people somewhere in the mix. And then the displaced people and people coming from the East, Lwów, the whole intelligentsia of Lwów. Here the university too. (29/M/77)

After the war people came here from different parts of Poland, right? Mostly from Lwów. So this intelligentsia from Lwów, maybe they didn’t want to but, you know, they also had to come here and at least at the university they introduced this climate of Polishness. (1/F/54)

This paper on the contemporary social practices of the existence and absence of the name Breslau is perhaps best to finish using a quote from Jacek Purchla, a heritology specialist, who, writing about the unwanted heritage – which is still the legacy of Breslau – remarks: “Deciding what is trouble and what is not lies within ourselves, it is a question of semantics, of our worldview. The question is, do we want to look at the world in a closed way, with just one line of thinking, for example the nationalist one, or are we able to take a wider look and see more?” (Purchla & Galusek, 2017, p. 16).

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## **The Name of the City – Social Memory and Oblivion: Wrocław Case**

### **Abstract**

In this paper, the author raises the question about the role of the study of oicons in the memory studies approach. The problem presented is the relationship between the city's past (and culturally alien) name and the contemporary construction of its past and modern identity. The main thread discussed is the construction of the presence/absence of the pre-war name Breslau in the contemporary discourses about the city's past of Wrocław's elites and inhabitants. To present the issue the author analysed samples of the discursive strategies derived from academic (historical and literary) discourses and from colloquial discourses of Wrocław inhabitants (thirty in-depth narrative interviews).

**Keywords:** city name; social memory; oblivion; discourse analysis; Breslau; Wrocław; “Recovered Territories”

### **Nazwa miasta – pamięć społeczna i zapomnienie. Przypadek Wrocławia**

#### **Streszczenie**

W artykule autorka stawia pytanie o rolę studiów nad ojkonimami w badaniach nad pamięcią społeczną. Omawiane w artykule zagadnienie to relacja między minioną (i kulturowo obcą) nazwą miasta a współczesnym konstruowaniem jego przeszłości i współczesnej tożsamości. Głównym wątkiem analizy jest konstruowanie obecności/nieobecności przedwojennej nazwy Breslau we współczesnych dyskursach elit i mieszkańców Wrocławia. Dla zaprezentowania zagadnienia autorka analizuje przykłady strategii dyskursywnej pochodzących z dyskursu akademickiego (historycznego i literaturoznawczego) oraz potocznego dyskursu mieszkańców Wrocławia (trzydzieści pogłębionych wywiadów narracyjnych).

**Słowa kluczowe:** nazwa miasta; pamięć społeczna; zapomnienie; analiza dyskursu; Breslau; Wrocław; „Ziemie Odzyskane”

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